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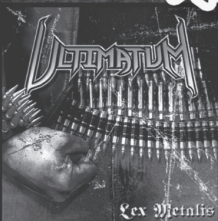
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HEAVEN'S METAL

GROWING, MATURITY AND MIGHTY RIFFS

It is so stinkin' cool to hear Stryper bringing fresh new metal to the scene. I'm so impressed with the maturity level of those guys and the solid, yet practical things they do amidst all the paint-peeling solos and power chords. I can't wait to see (at least) one of their shows on this *25th Anniversary Tour*. I'm also seriously stoked about seeing bands like Maylene & the Sons of Disaster, AILD, Flyleaf, and The Crucified in the near future. And if Tim Bushong (remember his band Lovewar?) does his job right producing Bride's last album, that thing should be a seriously hard rockin' metal album. I'm also particularly proud (I hate the word, though) of my brother Matt Hunt of Retroactive Records, who bought Bombworks Records and is releasing some seriously great stuff. Above and beyond all that great music, though, I'm honored to put together this magazine with such a great team. Check out the knowledgeable album reviews in this issue and you might agree with me. Heaven's Metal seems to be hitting its prime as a publication right now, so Lord willing, here's to continued quality. Also, please consider getting past any pre-conceived or past-induced attitudes about HM Magazine and subscribe to that publication, too. You won't get the whole picture with just one of these publications. They both complement each other and they're both way into metal. I'm as serious as an AILD riff or a Living Sacrifice cover story...


Doug Van Pelt



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Heaven's Metal Editorial Team:

Chris Beck, Bob Beeman, Chris Gatto, Loyd Harp, Ed Hellig, Johannes Jonsson, Mike Larson, Jeff McCormack, Steve Rowe, Jonathan Swank, Doug Van Pelt, Todd Walker

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Advertising/Editorial Info: dvanpelt@hmmag.com

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METAL TRACKS

Hard-news-for-metal-heads



By JONATHAN SWANK

Narnia is a band that needs no introduction in these pages. Their brand of neoclassical, progressive power metal has been pleasing fans for over a decade now. But when word came down that co-band founder/vocalist Christian Liljegren was leaving the band, the news sent shock waves through the Christian metal world. Regardless, with new Brazilian singer Germán Pascual at the helm and the release of their sixth studio offering *Course Of A Generation* on the horizon (July on Massacre), Narnia is powering on. Veteran shredder Carl Johann Grimmark provided the following update.

What's been happening with Narnia over the past year or so.

Carl Johann Grimmark: To make the long story a little shorter: Christian left us in the spring of 2008, so we really had to sit down and discuss the future of the band. We came to the conclusion that the vision and the mission of Narnia is bigger than any of its members or its members combined, so we decided to look for a new singer. After having listened to demos and clips from a great number of singers (plus spying on other bands) we got in touch with Germán, who had been longing for a chance to join a band with a Christian message. We fell for his voice and personality and invited him to come and jam with us, record a few songs, have a dinner and get to know each other – and here we are.

Can you tell our readers a bit about the new album, *Course Of A Generation*? Is this a concept album? What kind of themes are you dealing with this time around?

No, it's not a concept album, but some of it is dealing with what it's like to be a human being and the challenges, dreams and temptations, happiness and failures it may bring. It's about walking with God through better or worse and also about our responsibility for God's creation.

In what ways, if at all, has Narnia evolved musically with this new release? Have you had to change things up in any way to adjust to Pascual's vocal style?

Evolved? Oh YES, certainly! We've dared to take a big step in a few directions. The sound of the album will be more aggressive and modern, but I can also promise you the most sing-along friendly choruses we've ever done. When Germán joined, we only had two to three songs ready with lyrics and vocal melodies and all, so we had the chance to write the stuff tailored for his voice. We took great use of his ability to sing rough on the more aggressive songs, but there's also a great deal of moments where he sings soft and smooth, and all the range in between. He's a great talent!

[cont'd on next page]

News bullets

Demon Hunter is putting on a special event called the Huntour. One set of shows will be in Southern California on August 14th and 15th at The Glasshouse (in Pomona). The lineup on the 14th includes Demon Hunter, **The Crucified**, **The Great Commission**, and Throwdown; while the 15th includes **Focused** reunion show, **Living Sacrifice**, Demon Hunter, The Great Commission, and some surprise guests. Plans are for another show like this in Dallas, too.

Bride is now posting songs from the pre-production section on the "Bride Secret Site." This site is only opened for those that are taking part in the fan-financed CD. The reason for the "Fan-Financed CD" is to raise the necessary funds for recording, mixing, mastering (*Tsar Bomba*), for hotel accommodations, for food during the sessions, for any contributing musicians, for gasoline and transportation. Lots of little expenses turn into a mound of money in the end. *Tsar Bomba* is going to be a musical hard rock CD with big metal vocals at times. It will contain a ballad called "Downward," which could be one of the most emotional songs Bride has ever written. "All of the songs are filled with passion and the Bride edge that you expect to hear. The band hopes that you will find this new project the most imaginative release that they have ever produced to date." To see more about how this "Fan-Financed" CD will work, go to bridepub.com.

Creed, one of the most successful rock bands of the past decade, has announced all four of the original band members are back together for a summer tour and new album. Since their formation, Creed has sold close to thirty-five million albums and millions of concert tickets. The songwriting team of **Stapp** and **Tremonti** are considered one of the most prolific in rock history. Their collaborations delivered numerous chart-topping records that are a testament to the enormity and success of Creed. On reuniting, guitarist Mark Tremonti stated, "We're all very excited to reconnect with our fans and each other after six long years." Drummer **Scott Phillips** added, "Our career as Creed came to a very abrupt and unforeseen ending. After reflecting on some of the greatest personal and professional moments of our lives, we've come to realize that we are still very capable of continuing that career and our friendship on a grander scale than ever before." Bassist **Brian Marshall** continues, "This is a development we are all happy about. It has been a long time since the four of us have taken the stage together, and without hesitation or reservation this is something all of us are into. The anticipation to get back out there is electrifying." Singer Scott Stapp concluded, "It's amazing how life can change and bring you full circle. Time gave us all a chance to reflect, grow and gain a deeper appreciation of our friendships, artistic chemistry, passion for music, and sincere love for our fans! It's rare in life to get a second chance to make a first impression and we embrace the opportunity. We all believe the best is yet to come!" For more details about the upcoming tour go to creed.com.

With *This Day Forth*, **Grave Forsaken** release their 3rd effort, with "thrash metal in the vein of 80's thrash underdogs like Whiplash and At War, with classic metal influences and a breeze of punk." [graveforsaken.com]

POWERING ON...

Narnia cont'd:



What plans does Narnia have to tour with the new release?

We're booking shows in northern Europe for autumn 2009 at the moment, but our hope is to expand the horizon beyond that. We'd like to come to the U.S. of course, but it must be financially possible somehow.

Any plans for the new one to be distributed in the U.S. or only on Massacre?

We're talking to a few labels at the moment. I hope something will come out of that!

Carl, what is the biggest challenge that you face as a Christian musician in creating music these days and how do you overcome that?

One big struggle is always the financial side. No matter what some people say it's obvious that illegal downloading affects artists in a bad way, and the smaller you are, the more it hurts you. I'm very glad that we have no problem so far to get a label to release our albums. As long as you play your cards right you can at least make a record without ending up starving on the street. Three of us have either a home studio or pro-level recording equipment/studios ourselves, so we can make a great recording without renting a studio for two months. In Europe, we don't really have a "Christian music scene" as you do in the U.S. – well, it might be there, but it's very small – so we're working differently in that aspect, only with secular companies, etc. It might be considered a challenge but I don't mind that at all.

Outside of Narnia, what are you working on these days?

Last year we recorded a show with the Rob Rock band in Atlanta and we finished the post-production of a DVD recently. It's just about to be released in Europe. Other than that I work at a music store called Nya Musik.

Any words to our readers?

Please pick up our new album, *Course Of A Generation*, and make sure to make enough noise about it so that U.S. promoters invite us over real soon! Please remember us and our families in your prayers! God bless!!!

This from **Bryan Krotzer** of **Axehead Inc.**: "Luke Renno recently quit Axehead Inc, due to too many other commitments. On Sunday May 17, our drummer, **Eric Nelson** announced he didn't want to play any gigs. So, the several weeks of practice time – including that of our new bass player **Todd Brandt** – were all for naught. We were approached by Avalon booking agency and 1K Entertainment this spring to play shows in the Minneapolis area. The timing seemed right for an Axehead comeback. Oh well, I guess that's rock n roll. Unless the Lord drops a new drummer in our laps to replace Eric, this re-union is over with. I'm still running the Axehead Inc Myspace page as a ministry. Jason Krotzer has updated the Myspace page this past weekend with our current lineup and a new background picture. [myspace.com/axeheadinc]

YoungSide Records officially welcomes **Coriolis** to their roster of artists! After 2 years of inactivity, the popular industrial metal band is back with a vengeance. "I am truly excited about the future," says Arlene Marais, president of YoungSide Records. "It is a great opportunity to work with Coriolis and be a part of the growing Christian industrial scene." YoungSide Records is a label which specializes in "bands who rock hard, but clean." After working with and developing artists such as Disciple, The Awakening and Bridgesadows, YoungSide has enjoyed a reputation for providing high-quality music that doesn't compromise. Coriolis is an industrial metal band, in the vein of Circle of Dust and Klank, (or Marilyn Manson and Rob Zombie, in the secular scene.); After selling out of the first pressing of their debut album, Coriolis is now working with YoungSide Records to immediately put out a re-release with a bonus track. "I was blown away when I realized that we actually sold out of the first run of CD's, especially since we weren't playing any shows during that time," says Coriolis founder, **Jonathan P. Stamets**. The Coriolis self-titled re-release will be available in late June, at youngside.com, and also at Coriolis' live performances at Cornerstone 2009. For more information on Coriolis, including performance schedule, visit myspace.com/coriolis.

Upcoming releases from Retroactive and Bombworks Records: **Grave Robber** – *Inner Sanctum*; **Dark Lay Still** – *Through Hell* [myspace.com/darklaystillmetal]; **Darkness Before Dawn** – *King's To You* [myspace.com/darknessbeforedawn] (Recorded at Tim Lambesis studio.); **A Hill To Die Upon** – *Infinite Titanic Immortal* [myspace.com/ahilltodieuponband]; **Disaffection** (Believer/Slayer styled thrash from Brazil); [myspace.com/disaffectionthrashers]; **Bride** – *Tsar Bomba*; **Deus Invictus** (Bombworks); – prog death ala Cynic, Believer, Tourniquet meets Opeth [myspace.com/duesinvictus]; **Penny For The Old Guy** (Bombworks); – melodic prog/extreme [myspace.com/pftog]; **Liberty N' Justice** – *Light It Up*; **Jacobs Dream** – *Beneath The Shadows*; and **Saint** – *Hell Blade* (all new release!).

Bombworks Records is having another "Day of Metal" at Cornerstone. Check out this lineup: **The Crowned Virgin** (death / black); **Broken Flesh** (death metal); **The Consumed** (death / black); **Castaway** (progressive extreme metal); **Hope for the Dying** (progressive modern thrash); **The Burial** (modern thrash); **Divulgence** (blackened thrash); **Afterimage** (death / black); **Penny for the Old Guy** (progressive death); **Deborah** (gothic black); **Dark Lay Still** (symphonic black / death); **A Hill To Die Upon** (melodic black); **Occulto per Tribuo** (extreme metal); **Darkness Before Dawn** (death / black); **Dagon** (oceanic thrash); and **Bloodline Severed** (progressive modern metal).

METAL TRACKS

Page eight



WHITECROSS M.I.A.?

Where is Whitecross???

—Elder Toledo da Silva, via internet

Doc — Ask and you shall receive an update on Whitecross, from Rex Carroll:

"Whitecross is performing a few dates in Guatemala again this July. I'll be there for 2 weeks — I'm going to do some mixing and mastering for 7-A studio down there and some guitar clinics. Then the rest of the band will come in for seminars, and some shows. It also looks like we'll be in Buenos Aires in December for their big open-air rock/evangelism festival. This is an annual event for them; although it's new for me, so I am excited about it. And we may get over to Cleveland to do a couple of dates with a promoter over there. In other news, I have a new band called The Heal: Mike from Whitecross is drumming for it, plus a couple of new guys. It's a slow process for me, but the reaction has been incredibly positive, actually more so than I would even have hoped. So, I am extremely pumped about it and looking for opportunities there. Other than that, I am still teaching some guitar; Benny (bass) also teaches, and so does Mike (drums). Mike gigs with a local rock band on the side; Benny does some jazz things and is music pastor at his church. I've been at my home church going on 20 years and continue to play guitar, bass, drums, vocals ... whatever they need, ha ha. I also do a blues thing locally. I know it doesn't come out in Whitecross music, but, of course, I'm a huge Texas blues guitar aficionado — SRV, Anson Funderburgh, Johnny Winter, etc., and I've really worked a lot on that over the last several years. I can't say too much

for Scotty — he's excited about the WVC gigs but other than that I know he does the worship team at his church."

BRAZIL, HOME OF THE METAL

Okay, so here I am reading the latest issue of *Heaven's Metal*, and see an e-mail I sent to you there about a "Mother of All Mother's Day" issue. Your comment was about having a "Brazilian Metal" cover. Have you been reading my posts online? Or reading my mind? YES! That would be awesome. Brazil is exporting some great music. Do it NOW!

—Robert Wilson, via internet

Doc — Lord willing, Robert, look for our all-Brazilian metal issue soon.

UNDER COMMAND

There's no way to order Under Command's *Back in the Thick* CD advertised in last issue. The Under Command page at ragingstormrecords.com includes a link to pre-order. However, since it was released on March 21, that information is out of date. Two e-mails to Raging Storm went ignored. Thought I'd let you know what's going on. Thanks and keep up the good work with *Heaven's Metal*.

—Andrew Elovich, via internet

Ed — Thanks, I'd think the guys at the site would help you. I went there and it looks a-okay to me.

[nothin' but] News bullets

Cage, the power metal heroes from the United States, are coming up with their next masterpiece. This time they throw some more coals into the fire with *Science Of Annihilation*. First results promise the power metal fans one of the hot-test release highlights for 2009. [cageheavymetal.com]

New Mexico based **Ultimatum** have announced that they are currently in the studio finishing touches on their new album of covers titled, *Lex Metalis*. The band is recording the album at Albuquerque's Site 16 Studios, where they also recorded their *Into The Pit* CD. They are scheduled to record Metallica's "Creeping Death," Motorhead's "Iron Fist," Vengeance Rising's "Can't Get Out," Mosheketee's "Locked In Chains," Judas Priest's "Steeler," and Mortification's "Gut Wrench" among others. *Lex Metalis* is scheduled for release on June 23, 2009 via Retroactive Records.

Retroactive Records and **Liberty N' Justice** are proud to announce "guest" musicians for two more songs for LNJ's upcoming 2009 release, *Light It Up* (formerly announced title was *The Cigar Chronicles*). Lynn Louise Lowrey of Vixen & Eddie Ojeda of Twisted Sister join forces on the song "Blink" and bandmates, Ted Poley of Danger Danger/Poley-Rivera & Vic Rivera of Crunch/Poley-Rivera rock out on the song "Man vs. MotherNature." These 4 join already announced guest musicians Robert Mason of Warrant/Lynch Mob, Jerry Dixon of Warrant, Marq Torien of Bulletboys, Chris Holmes of W.A.S.P., **Les Carlson** of Bloodgood, **Oz Fox** of Stryper/Bloodgood, **Dale & Troy Thompson** of **Bride!** Go to libertynjustice.net to see the updated track listing.

Retroactive Records is also honored to announce the signing of the mighty **Jacobs Dream**, a world leader in melodic, progressive power metal! Having already released three albums on Metal Blade Records this decade, as well as two independent releases, Jacobs Dream is currently recording a new album, *Beneath The Shadows*. The release is a concept album based on a story written by vocalist, **Chaz Bond** and will release later in 2009. [myspace.com/jacobsdream]

Neither **Eden In Ruins** or **Transfigural Form** will be active after today. Both will be respectfully ended. Eden had a near 15 year long run and TF 8. "It was fun while it lasted, but I feel as if I cannot serve God the way He wills me to while having those two projects on my plate." According to **Todd Ash** (myspace.com/northash); there will be no future releases from either project, and it is also uncertain at this time if any reissues will ever be made available in the future.

The Anvil And Hammer radio broadcast has awarded **Rex Scott** of **X-Sinner** the annual most-listened-to podcast award for 2008/09. The podcast was the most listened to interview on iTunes out of all the bands the *Anvil And Hammer* broadcast had produced. The list of bands is considerable and included such artists as Demon Hunter, among others. "This is a cool award and we thank all the fans who support us and all those who checked us out for the first time and the *Anvil And Hammer* broadcast for doing the interview."



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STRYPER

Putting God on the throne of a tour...

BY DOUG VAN PELT

MICHAEL SWEET, THE CURRENT AND UNDISPUTED LEADER OF STRYPER, IS A CONFIDENT MAN. MUCH OF THIS CAN BE CONTRIBUTED TO THE STRENGTH OF HIS WOMAN (AND WIFE) OF NEARLY 23 YEARS, KYLE RAE SWEET. WHEN HE LEFT STRYPER BACK IN THE EARLY 90s, HE MOVED HIS FAMILY UP TO MASSACHUSETTS, WHERE KYLE WAS FROM. THEY SHARED A HOUSE WITH HER MOM AND SPENT SUMMERS AT HER DAD'S CAMPGROUND RESORT. MY FAMILY AND I SPENT THE BETTER PART OF A WEEK WITH THEM UP AT THIS CAMPGROUND, WHERE WE SAW A FORMER ROCK STAR HUMBLING HIMSELF WITH NO FUSS AND A GREAT SENSE OF HUMOR, DONNING GIANT WADERS AND HARVESTING CRANBERRIES IN A LARGE BOG. AS THEY BOTH PARENTED THEIR TWO KIDS, IT WAS EASY TO SEE HOW MUCH KYLE GROUNDED HER HUSBAND WITH THE AMAZING VOICE.

Fast-forward over a decade and I find Michael in Nashville with guitarist, Oz Fox, making a promotional visit for Stryper's new album, *Murder By Pride*. I wonder how awkward it is for him to meet several people that reach out with kind, supportive words on the loss of his bride, who succumbed to cancer in March. Sometimes, when a friend suffers loss, the most supportive thing we can be or do is just to hang out, hug, or smile. Trying to find the right words to say can be an effort in futility.

When I sat down at the end of a hallway to interview Michael and Oz (because their publicist's suite was already full and being used by other artists and journalists – oh, how the days of platinum sales have disappeared...), I decided to get the awkward questions out of the way early.

Oz, how have you been stretched and what have you experienced in seeing your good friend having to go through the death of their spouse? How's it impacted you and affected your life?

Ooh, that's ... that's definitely a tough question. I can't tell you how... First of all, to everyone out there and, of course, my buddy Michael, Kyle was just an extremely special person in my life. I really looked up to her in a lot of ways. She was so intelligent. Her heart was incredible. I spent a lot of time hanging out with her. Actually, we all lived together on the road, pretty much, quite a bit. I was happy to spend the time that I did get to spend with her while she was here, but now she's with the Lord. I can't wait to get there to see her. That's what I'm looking forward to. I think the day after she passed, I think I mentioned on my facebook that she's probably up there with a big cup of cappuccino. She's just smiling right now..."

"They don't have cappuccino's in heaven, dude," Michael informs him. (then my phone rings with the "Take A Chance On Me" ringtone by Abba, and I hand the phone to Michael. "Here: You wanna talk to Charlotta?" And me and Oz continue our portion of the interview while Michael chats with my wife.)

"She's probably always going to be in my heart. I'm certainly blessed to know that I had somebody like that in my life. I'm so happy that Mike had her as his better half for so many years. She definitely was the pillar, I would have to say, in the whole set of wives in the band. I'll always appreciate that example that she set for all of us – especially living with this guy," he points to Michael and chuckles. "As we all know, he's quite a handful himself."

"Mike, through the whole thing, was just amazing. I spent a lot of time talking to him on the phone about the whole thing. His heart was just so amazingly dedicated to her. The connection at that point with his wife, I can tell, it had to be 100% no frills, no distractions – especially no distractions from Stryper and all the drama that happens with it. Aside from that, Kyle was a big part of the reason Michael went and did the tour with Boston. It was amazing to see that happen."

"So, long story short, I had the experience of having Kyle in my life as a sister. There's a special bond between Mike and I, so I felt the heartache. I spent a long time just grieving our loss – especially his, but mine, too. I looked up to her in a lot of ways."

Oz then explains that he's freelancing it as his interviewing journalist friend takes the call from his wife. Michael asks

"I sold everything I had," interjects Oz. And then Michael's straight face begins to crack and he has a little trouble breathing in his effort to hold back the laughter. I don't bother to point out that his math is a little funny... His ability and willingness to be so silly is a sign that he's taking this "living life fully" principle to heart.

"This record was unlike any other record I've ever done. It was so drawn out and segmented, but it was the only way it could have happened. There was a time when I thought it wouldn't happen. When Kyle was first diagnosed, I thought, 'Well, Stryper is no more for now. We'll put this thing on pause – maybe for a long time – and maybe indefinitely. It was so strange. I look back on it now and I think, 'It's done. It's coming out July 21st. We're going to tour.' It doesn't seem real, but it is. We're here in this moment. It's a really good record and something we all feel really strongly about. I think we got back more to our roots – musically – that people were requesting. They wanted to hear more guitars, harmony solos and harmony vocals – all the things that people talk about when they talk about Stryper musically. We went there. We did that. We got back to that. We got away from that on the *Reborn* record. So, I think people are going to appreciate that. The die-hard fans."

"Any new fans – potential new fans – might hear it and say, 'Oh my god! I hate this! What is this Cheez-Whiz?'"

"I think God's hand is on it,
and that's the most important thing for a band like us.
If His hand isn't on it, then we're kind of spinning our wheels."

him, "What happens if you push that red button – that iTalk button?"

"I don't know. It probably stops. I don't think it has a pause function." Michael starts singing, "Don't – PUSH – me! Don't push me!" like a chant, clubbing his friend with the temptation to do the exact opposite of his command.

I turn to Michael and say, "I didn't want to belabor the whole subject or anything. Is there anything you wanted to say?" "Just what we were talking about earlier," Michael answers. "I'm feeling the importance more-so than ever of carrying on and living life – of trying hard to live life the way God wants me to live it, which I think Kyle wants, too. I think she wants me to be happy and joyful. Life is gone in a blink. None of us know... It's such a gift. Obviously, we're going to eternity here... I believe in the Lord we're going to eternity, but life is a gift from the Lord. We kind of take that for granted sometimes and don't use the time wisely. So, I've learned the importance of that, more so than ever, having gone through that the last few years."

"Let's talk about this album," I suggest, switching gears towards the main purpose of their trip to Nashville. "Give me a brief little history of when the songs came to you and when they got formulated as full band songs and how they got to be recorded."

"It's really weird, the way we did it," offers Michael, straight-faced. "Totally different... We called Robert. We said, 'Dude, we need some songs.'"

Oz immediately starts laughing.

Michael continues: "He said, 'Okay. How many?'"

"About 12.' And I said, 'We're willing to spend a lot of money here.' He goes, 'How much?'"

"I said, 'About 20 Grand a song,' so we sent him, you know, a cashier's check for \$120,000."

"I don't think anyone is gonna say that," adds Oz, as if reassuring Michael against a very real fear (I jest).

"It's a good record," concludes Michael. "I'm proud of it. I really am. When I listen to this record, I think God's hand is on it, and that's the most important thing for a band like us. If His hand isn't on it, then we're kind of spinning our wheels. I think His hand is on it. Then, the second thing after that, what's most important is the fact that it's a record someone can pop in and be moved by musically. I think it is. It's got some great points to it."

"Is it our best record? I don't know. It could be. I really don't know. I think it's up there. It's high on the list for me."

"I think it's a really good record," adds Oz. "It's well thought. The music's awesome. I had a great time recording it. It reminded me of the old *To Hell With The Devil* days, when we would work and try to make the stuff sound right and start getting into fistfights over the volume of the solos," he starts laughing.

"Which, by the way," Michael responds, "they're loud enough!"

"It's an exciting time," he continues. There's a few things going on with the tour. We're going to go out and do a set with Tracy, the new bass player and a set with Tim – the old bass player. The thinking behind that was: 'Let's go out and show people that we mean what we say. We talk about healing and restoration, but we don't show it necessarily sometimes. We talk about it. And it sounds dreamy, but to show it is really what it takes. That's what matters.' We're going to do that, by going out together – the five of us. Going out with Robert again... There's been some questions over ... publicized by, 'What's going on with Robert? Why didn't he play?' By all of us uniting together for this tour is going to show that we can work things through. It might not be perfect, but nothing is. No relationship is, but we're working on it."

"I mean, bringing Timmy back out," continues Oz. "That's definitely a big step. Tim left the band and the separation was mutual. It was in 2004 and he wasn't happy. We didn't want him to be unhappy and we, obviously, wanted to have everything feeling right within the band. When he left, when he felt that was supposed to happen and then when Tracy joined the band, it was a whole different feel, but it was good. For whatever reasons, this is now going to occur, I think Michael is correct in saying that it is time for us in our faith – in our Christian walks – to show maturity to one another. I have to go back to the fruits of the Spirit. All of those things have to really be sought out when we're together. It can get overwhelming day-to-day living, dealing with each other. Sometimes you just don't have the patience, you don't have the self-control. You don't have the kindness. All of these things that have to really be every day kind of brought up and reminded of. It's going to be important for us. I really think that, if God is in the middle of this, and we truly put Him on the throne of this tour, there's no stopping what God could do. It'll be amazing."

When asked about the title track, Michael expressed that he hopes it'll be the first single. "It kind of captures lyrically a very powerful message about our pride consuming us and crippling us and holding us all back and how we need to allow God to take that from us,

because we can't do that on our own – we can't break free of that on our own. And then musically, it's kind of old-school Stryper. It's got the harmony guitar solos and that kind of "gunk-gunk-gunk-gunk" Priest-ish, "Green Manalishi" kind of thing. I think it's a representation of where we're at now spiritually and musically."

So, what made Stryper go back to their classic sound (harmony guitars and vocals)? And why this tour with the original costumes?

Oz interrupts with total shock in his voice: "We're going back out with costumes?!? What?"

Michael explains patiently. "The plan is to take a break, like a half-hour break. Maybe have another band play during that half-hour break. We'll go back and then come out with Tim in yellow and black costumes. Not the original costumes."

When I point out the flyer that I saw, where it says, "Original costumes," he fires back like he's a seasoned pro at handling controversy. "That's a poor choice of words. We're going to have some new outfits made. When I say outfits, I mean like maybe some black jeans with yellow things sewn on to them and some custom-made shirts and a vest – that kind of thing. It's not going to be like old-school glitz and lace and sequins and all that stuff."

"Lipstick!" adds Oz, followed by laughter. "I'm sure that you'll see some spandex, though, because Robert's still in the band. And the Aqua-Net for his hair. He's got an endorsement with Aqua-Net."

"Do you like spandex, Doug?" Michael asks, further acting in the mode of handling the media. "I could set you up, man."

"I was thinking of getting the spandex things that go over your head like the wrestlers," explains Oz. "That would be cool."

"The idea came from ... I called three days after Kyle's services. I picked up the phone to management. I said,

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SEVENTH ANGEL

Dusting Off Your Ears

BY CHRIS BECK

SEVENTH ANGEL IS TYPICALLY CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST CHRISTIAN THRASH METAL BANDS OF ALL TIME, THOUGH THIS MONIKER DOESN'T BEGIN TO DESCRIBE THEIR SOUND. NOW RE-FORMED WITH ORIGINAL MEMBERS IAN ARKLEY ON VOCALS, MARK BROOMHEAD ON BASS, SIMON BIBBY ON GUITAR AND ANDREW "TANK" THOMPSON ON DRUMS, THE BAND JUST RELEASED *THE DUST OF YEARS*, AN ALBUM THAT IS MUSICALLY DIVERSE AND CAPTIVATING WHILE STILL MAINTAINING SOME OF THE CLASSIC SEVENTH ANGEL SOUND. WE RECENTLY CAUGHT UP WITH ALL OF THE BAND MEMBERS TO DISCUSS THE NEW ALBUM AND FIND OUT WHAT THEY'VE BEEN UP TO ALL THESE YEARS.

Chris Beck: It's been almost 20 years since the recording of *Lament for the Weary*. Why release a new Seventh Angel album now, after all this time?

Ian Arkley: Because we have re-formed the band. We would never do it to relive the past, but because we want to be making music together again and because we enjoy creating something brand new.

Mark Broomhead: It took us that long to write the songs! Only joking; in fact, it has been the quickest project I have ever been involved in. The first time we heard some of the songs in their entirety was as the component parts were assembled in the studio. It was very risky, but very exciting.

Simon Bibby: Who knows why we end up doing half the things we do? Some of us in the band hadn't been in contact with each other for a number of years. When we did eventually all meet up again, the seed was sown and before you know it you're agreeing to all sorts of crazy things. There is no master plan. We're just enjoying being able to play music together again and also simply to spend time with each other.

Andrew "Tank" Thompson: After my wedding a couple of years ago, we met up and

had a couple of beers; we talked about the good old days and that was the start of it. We thought it would be fun to start playing together, but it took another year of talking and phone calls to even get together to jam. When we started getting offered gigs, it seemed that there was potential to have some fun again. We wrote songs quickly and people wanted us to play, so we are back.

Is Seventh Angel a concept you thought you had permanently moved on from, or did you always suspect that one day you would once again be playing Seventh Angel music?

Ian: No, I never thought I would return to Seventh Angel. Until recently it wasn't a consideration at all. Just two or three years ago, we all started to see each other a lot more and remembered how much we loved spending time together and making our music. When Seventh Angel re-formed it was a very exciting thing for me and the others. It was one of those events that you can't quite believe is actually happening and I had serious worries that it could get embarrassingly emotional onstage! The first song we played at our reunion gig in Norway was "Lament for the Weary," and it was a great feeling to be playing that song live for the first time and to actually be playing a gig with Seventh Angel again after a break



of 16 years. I managed not to weep like a small child, which is fortunate for everyone concerned.

Tank: If you'd have asked me five years ago, I would have said there was no chance as we had pretty much lost touch with each other and were all doing our own things. So, it is a bit of a shock to be playing together again.

Do you consider Seventh Angel to be a Christian band?

Ian: I consider Seventh Angel to be a band. I am not too keen on labeling the band in our lyrics or music, other than being a metal band. As far as music goes, thrash on its own doesn't come close to describing what we sound like. As for our personal beliefs, they are just that — personal. I have realized over the years how much some (mainly self-righteous) people judge you on this and sometimes it is better to say nothing. I want everyone to listen to and enjoy our music, whether they are Christians, Satanists or whatever, and I don't want anyone to think they will be judged by us for what they believe, because they certainly will not be. We have a wide range of beliefs within the band, but we never have any problems with each other, because of this; it just makes things richer and more interesting.

Mark: Seventh Angel has a very obvious spiritual heritage and has been part of a journey for 13 members over the years. In the early days there was

a very corporate spirituality, but now inevitably with so many years apart we have gone on our own spiritual adventures that have taken us to different places. While it is difficult to call an inanimate concept such as a band "Christian," I am a follower of Jesus, flawed and inadequate, as are we all, and all my inputs into the band are from that perspective. My day job is as a church leader. I think that was probably a long way of saying 'no' if you were to press me.

Simon: Is that like a Christian breakfast cereal? To be honest, I try to steer away from labels. I don't even like the band's music to be categorized. I am a follower of Christ and I play in a band. When I write lyrics, my faith and other facets of my personality and life experience come out. Does that make Seventh Angel a Christian band? I don't think so.

Tank: It is a difficult one for me, as I have been a practicing Buddhist for a couple of years and help to run a Buddhist meditation group in my town. I would have to say we are a spiritual band with a positive attitude, but in no way do we set out to push our own ideas or beliefs onto anybody else.

Some listeners will be able to relate to the lyrics of *The Dust of Years* due to difficult circumstances in their lives. What message would you like for them to get from your songs? What encouragement would you offer them?

Ian: To realize they are not alone in the struggle and that many others have been through the same things. Life is like a long journey of discovery and our feelings and attitudes change as we go along. I have often expressed dissatisfaction with my old lyrics, which were written as someone who was immature and had high ideals that were based on a life without the experiences I have had since and with all the lessons I have learned. I am still learning. I think it is important to get on with something that you are interested in when life is becoming difficult and to never give up on life. It is never the right thing to do to end your life. Eventually things will change; sometimes it is just a case of hanging on and going from one day to the next. Finding someone good to talk to is very helpful. I would also encourage people who have friends going through hard experiences to be there for them and to make a real effort not to judge, but to be loving and to understand that any advice given may or may not be taken.

Simon: That there are no easy, on the spot, quick fix answers to many things in life, but there is hope.

HEAVEN'S
METAL

(Read the full interview at hmmag.com.)



DEUTERONOMIUM

Not Just Songs For The Saved

BY CHRIS GATTO

WE'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOU TO A BAND THAT HAS BEEN AROUND FOR QUITE SOME TIME, BUT IS NEW TO OUR PAGES. AFTER A LENGTHY HIATUS, LAST YEAR BROUGHT US THE RETURN OF FINLAND'S OWN DEUTERONOMIUM WITH A PHENOMENAL COMEBACK ALBUM, *FROM THE MIDST OF BATTLE*, SO WE THOUGHT IT PRUDENT TO BRING YOU THE SCOOP ON EVERYTHING PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE WITH THE BAND.

Chris Gatto: Manu, please introduce yourself and the rest of the band.

Manu Lehtinen: I'm a 36-year-old metalhead from Finland, and the founder of Deuteronomium. In the band, I play bass and do some additional vocals. I write most of the lyrics and some of the music. Plus I take care of the band's graphical style (album layouts, merch, etc.). Miika Partala (33) is the other original member in the band. He's the lead vocalist and rhythm guitarist. He's the main composer and writes some of the lyrics as well. Kalle Paju (33) is our lead guitarist and has been in the band from pretty early times, too. Kalle also writes some of the songs. J-J Kontoniemi (30) is the drummer, and also the latest one to join the band: he's been around "only" since 1997.

Deut. formed in 1993 and on your various recordings the band's sound has evolved. Was that a conscious decision to change styles, a change in the musical climate, or member change?

Well, when we started the band, we were just kids. We simply made songs and if we liked them, we played them. I guess now we were subconsciously searching for our own style. Our debut album, *Street Corner Queen*, sounded like a compilation CD, only it was made by just one band. There's many great songs, but on the other hand, there's also some stuff that could've been left out! (laughs) For our second album, we sat down and decided which way we wanted to go musically, and then did it. *Here To Stay* ended up sounding like we wanted it to, and it really is a tight package of death 'n roll, death metal with rock 'n roll and even some blues feeling in it.

After *Here To Stay* in 1999, all was quiet with the band until the last couple years. What was going on with the band and what brought you back to the scene?

After *HTS* we played some gigs around Europe, the last show being at Freakstock festival in Germany in the summer of 2000. The band broke up for various personal and interpersonal reasons and we each went our ways, seeing each other only occasionally. It looked like that would be the end of Deuteronomium, but a chance meeting with the singer in 2005 opened up communication again and we all became more open to the idea of the band returning, but waited on God's timing. Maybe we could play together again, but I'd have to be certain that's something God wants us to do, so I don't want us to do anything about it by ourselves. If He wants us to play again, He's got his ways of showing it to us. A day or two later that confirmation came when a friend asked if Deuteronomium would reform to play for a festival. In June of 2006 we played a show after six years of silence! I really think that was something God did. He knows I can be really stubborn at times, so He decided to talk clearly enough to make a jerk like me understand what He's saying. We played the show, even recorded it for DVD, and it seemed clear to all of us that the band was alive again. And, I can tell you, it's absolutely great to be back with this band! Most of us had some other bands and projects while Deuteronomium was buried, but it just wasn't the same. At least for the four of us, there's really something special in this band, and I hope we can also share that with the audience.

Being from Scandinavia, does the Gothenburg death metal sound influence your music now more than it has in the past?

Actually, I think it's just the opposite way; it used to influence us more in the past than



Does your three-pronged logo have any special meaning or significance?

No deep meaning. It consists of three d letters from our very first logo. I got this idea of combining three of those, and we liked the result. Our name is difficult, so the symbol helps people remember us.

What role does the Christian faith have in your music?

Deuteronomium is born of Christian faith, to tell about Christ, so faith is at our band's core. Not all of our songs are full gospel, but all of our lyrics are dealing with Christian faith, in a way or another. Deuteronomium is a Christian band, and we're not hiding it. Though we used to preach from the stage, we find that it's better for us to be a metal band amongst others, yet living as followers of Christ. You don't have to be a Christian to enjoy our music, but if you're interested in what we sing about, you will find the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Your new EP, *Retaliatory Strike*, will only be available as a digital release and eventually on vinyl. Is this in response to declining CD sales everywhere, or just as a teaser?

For the label, selling the EP digitally will hopefully offset the expense of producing the vinyl copies, which the hardcore fans will eat up. From the band's side, we're old school guys and we like to get our music in a tangible package, not just some crappy mp3's. If we were a bigger band, with a bigger budget, I'd like to make even more artistic and special packages. But I'm proud of what this small underground band has turned out thus far. The secret is devotion and hard work. You can save a lot of bucks by doing more things by yourself. The EP will also give fans something to listen to until our next album, as well. We chose an old Betrayal song as the title cut for its lyrics as well as music tying in with the last album.



it does now. We've always got lots of melodies in our death/thrash metal, so I think at least that's something we share with the Gothenburg sound.

How has last year's *From the Midst of the Battle* been received? It appears to be your strongest material. I especially like "Song of the Saved" and the allegorical picture of Christ in "Tales from the Midst of the Battle."

We've had great reviews in magazines and webzines, and also the fans seem to really like it! Other critics and the band itself seem to agree that *FTMOTB* has been our strongest release this far, so we're satisfied with the album, but eager to make the next even better. "Song Of The Saved" was Kalle's only writing contribution for the album, and it's one of the best songs on it. I really love that song, and it's really fun to play live! "Tales from the Midst of the Battle" has an interesting story behind it. The lyrics and music for "Part I: The Mission" were written by my wife and I and unused from the first album. Miika found some old tapes with it on and we added "Part II" by Kalle and "Part III" by Miika. And still it sounds like a solid oeuvre, doesn't it? I'm glad we recorded it now, rather than then, because it became a really impressive piece of metal art.

Do you have any plans to play in the US sometime?

We really wish to get there some day, preferably sooner than later! One thought is to get our album licensed to the US market first, then come and tour, but the opposite approach might work too. I'd like to tour with War Of Ages, whom we played with at B4X-Mas festival in Switzerland in Dec 2008. They're great guys, and their axemen Brandon and Steve knew amazingly much about Finland and the Finnish metal bands!

Any final words for our readers?

Stay heavy! And remember that although metal music is a mighty thing, it can't save your soul and wash away your sins. Only the blood of Christ can do that. So enjoy the metal from the bottom of your heart, but put the foundation of your life upon the Rock!

Thanks so much for talking with us and best wishes for the coming year.

Thanks, Chris, it was a real pleasure talking with you!

HEAVEN'S METAL



Wake Up!

BY JONATHAN SWANK

IF YOU HAVEN'T HEARD OF CLEVERLY NAMED SOULJOURNERS YET – AND CALL YOURSELF A FOLLOWER/FAN OF THE PROGRESSIVE METAL/MELODIC METAL SCENE – YOU'LL WANT TO CHECK OUT THIS FEATURE. THIS FOUR-PIECE FROM SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA – FRONTED BY THE TALENTED MICHAEL COUTS (SINGER/SONGWRITER/GUITARIST) – INDEPENDENTLY RELEASED THEIR SPECTACULAR DEBUT, *MIND CONTROL*, BACK IN 2008. OVER THE PAST YEAR, THEY'VE BEEN MAKING A LOT OF WAVES IN THE UNDERGROUND SCENE AND THEY WILL BE PLAYING A GIG WITH KING'S X THIS SUMMER IN A TOUR THAT WILL CONCLUDE AT CORNERSTONE FESTIVAL. FORTUNATELY, I WAS ABLE TO CATCH UP WITH MICHAEL BEFORE THEY HEADED OUT ON TOUR.

Jonathan Swank: Okay, straight up... I've listened to *Mind Control*, like 20 times... How is it that you guys aren't "signed" already? (laughs)

Michael Coutts: I ask the same question. (laughs) We are dedicated to our art and if any labels are interested we are ready! I will tour on a bicycle if I have to.

Seriously, tell me a bit about the band and how you all came together.

We started out back in 2003, when I was in high school. I used to go to a youth group and they had a musician's workshop. Basically, they took teen kids and taught them worship songs like Delirious. I met David (Brokenborough) our bass player there, started jamming, moved to my garage, found a drummer and started gigging. We picked up Paul (Ellingson – keyboards) about two years later and became Souljourners.

Why progressive metal?

I believe music is an art form. I myself am more intrigued by the works of Leonardo Da Vinci opposed to a painting of a simplistic apple. I think music becomes more interesting the more in-depth it becomes. Anyone can write a song verse-chorus-

verse-chorus, but progressive (metal) can make music non-linear, breaking the simple rules of songwriting, which we love to do. The trick is not losing the listener's attention at the same time.

***Mind Control* is a fantastic listen from start to finish. With all the "concept" metal albums already out there, what motivated you – in 2008 – to write something so epic and conceptual?**

I am a teller of tales. Ever since I was 5, I loved telling made-up stories. My biggest motivation was *Operation: Mindcrime* from Queensryche and *Scenes From A Memory* from Dream Theater. We view our music as a director views his movie; music can be more effective if you tell a story or convey a message to the listener. We feel we owe it to our fans to give them more than just a CD – give them a whole experience. We are actually writing another concept for 2009.

[Let me just interject here... *Mind Control* is an epic 73-minute concept piece (see description below) that succeeds on many levels. Not only do they tell a great story,

but they do it in way that never dulls the listener's appetite for more. Yeah, they have the huge chops and the instrumental prowess that this style of metal/rock dictates, but the melodies are diverse and memorable. The end result is a beautifully crafted conceptual work with songs that stand up well on their own.]

Summarize, if you will, the concept/story behind *Mind Control*.

A future society where every aspect of your life is controlled by the government. To keep you in line they sedate you. Basically, it's a man fighting against this system. Along the way he falls in love only to lose her. The rest of the album he fights against this society to save the woman he loves and he wants to know what life really is. And he would die just to get a glimpse of the other side. You need to get *Mind Control* for the rest of the story. (laughs) The whole point is to urge people to wake up and realize what's going on.

Looking back through the long line of prog metal pioneers who have preceded you ...to which band or artist do you most closely relate – both musically and lyrically – and why?

I would say Queensrÿche. They had the same message going for a while. Look around you, see what's happening, make a difference! Think about your future.

I have to tell you, there are some seriously well-placed truths in your lyrics which appear to be based on a biblical/Christian worldview. Is that the case?

The story of *Mind Control* is not based on a Christian worldview, it is based on a future society which outlaws anyone's god or anyone's religion, free thought or art. The government is an evil force which one man decides to face. It is meant to be interpreted differently for anyone who hears our album from all walks of life and religions. But I was raised Christian so it would make sense if it comes off that way.

For a Christian who is an artist/musician, what do you feel is the most important quality or message that you want to impart to your listeners through your music?

Wake up and make a difference. People live day to day just doing what they are told. Question everything. Where does the government get all their money? Why is it so hard to get a job in 2009? Just things that affect our daily life. We are all just a speck of sand on the beach ... what can a speck do? Well, it can do a lot if the grains around move together. Just help each other out rather than look down on or judge people.

What is the essence of Souljourners in five words or less?

Euphonious, vehement, metamorphosis, awareness, entertaining.

What's the next step for you guys?

We have a summer tour lined up for 2009 ending at Cornerstone! We also gig all over California weekly. We are also in the process of writing another concept album hopefully released late 2009. And of course, making more music videos/short films.

When you perform live, do you use one or two guitarists?

As of now, we just have me doing guitar live; the keyboards harmonize and fill in very well also. But I want to add another guitar into the mix very soon so we can have some really complex riffs live that I can sing over.

Thank you for taking the time out to share and to your commitment to creating great music. You guys rule!

No, you rule!

No, these guys rule! Check 'em out, as I've no doubt that we will be hearing more from them soon. Stay tuned. [myspace.com/souljourners]

And for all you Stryper fans... Michael actually studied under the infamous Oz Fox for a time. He actually credits Oz for opening his eyes (or fingers if you will) to a whole new dimension in playing and thinking outside the box. The time Michael spent learning from Oz made a tremendous difference in how he approached his playing.

"Hey, what about a tour? Let's put together a tour." Again, that came from that need of wanting to do things and take advantage of every moment and opportunity and not waste another minute. That's how that came to be. That kind of fell into place... I suggested, "Why don't we go out with Tim?" Without hesitation. I've just been kind of reacting like lately. Now, is that a good thing? I don't know. But I make real quick decisions lately. If I feel good about it and I'm at peace with it, "Let's go do it!" That's what happened with the tour. I went in and mentioned to Mike about it. Mikey (his son) has a band and they're going to be opening some shows. I just didn't even hesitate. He has two bands: A hardcore band, which wouldn't be appropriate, because musically speaking, they're nothing similar. And then he has this other band, they're called Flight Patterns, and they're like a pop-edged rock band. And they're really good. I just felt inclined to not even think twice about it and go in and say, "Mike, how would you like to do this?" I've seen Mikey ... he's like a different person now. He's been struggling the past two years. He's kind of been in a hole. We've really been having a tough time getting him out of that hole. And this is giving him a purpose and an excitement. He's working and writing and he's a different kid. So, for that reason alone, worth it! How are they going to sound? I don't know. I haven't ever heard 'em. I have no idea. I have heard some of the music they've recorded, and it's really good; but I've never seen them play.

"I'm just kind of stepping out and I have this attitude. Oz knows this. I tend to be a person that stresses over everything and over-analyzes everything. 'Oh! Wait a minute! Let's think about this.' And I'm like the opposite now. I don't know what's going on. I'm enjoying it. It's less stress. I have so much less stress now. It's weird, man."

"I've learned in my life over the past few years," replies Oz, dealing with things in my life, that stress does nothing but put more grey hair on my head or in my beard. If I'm trusting God for everything, He won't give me any more than I can handle."

"Any more grey hair?" Michael asks, as if he's interested in that kind of deal with God.

"I don't know about that, but I know that deep down, when situations come up, I've learned to trust the Lord with everything and if He's my Protector and I trust Him like the Israelites did in the desert and the wilderness for 40 years after they left Egypt... I mean, my gosh, they had nothing to worry about. It was all... Even though they still did complain, God still took care of them."

"And us, too," adds Michael. "We complain, every day. And He takes care of us. Always."

"So, I've learned to live that way," continues Oz. "I'm going to live by faith and trust in God and God's never let me down ever since I've started doing that. I tell ya, some amazing things have happened. I've seen God do some incredible miracles in my life and it's part of the journey. It really is. It's really cool to not have to worry about what's going to happen tomorrow, because I take the past and I put it under the blood. And I put the future in God's hands. And the present, I just live by the Spirit, and I just never go wrong that way. It's awesome."

I hear a lot of harmonic pitch squeals on this album, like where you're bending the string at the end of a phrase... Is that what you call 'em?

"It could be harmonic pitch squeal. I usually call 'em ... are you talking about a 'squawk?'" asks Michael. We all share our vocal imitations of what this sounds like. It evokes more laughter – especially when one of us nails it. "Yeah, man. It's got a lot of that stuff to it – that people talk about wanting to hear more of. I think we gave it to 'em. I think if we gave 'em any more, it would be overkill."

"As far as guitar playing goes," explains Oz, "I mean, we cut our teeth on 80s rock and 80s guitar playing. That's really what it boils down to. And also late 70s guitar heroes ... which, right now are on the Guitar Hero game... That's all the stuff that we grew up listening to and learned how to play guitar with. So, it all comes out from our influences."

How did the guitar leads evolve?

"Just worked together at the house... Oz was at my house and we just worked 'em out. He'd have an idea, I'd have an idea. We'd work those parts out and come up with another idea and just worked and worked and worked and just made it happen."

"The process goes," expounds Oz, "we'll already have the idea of what the arrangement the solo is – what chords – and once you've got that arrangement, it's a matter of putting in the melody of the solo. Michael will go, 'Let's start off this way,' and he'll come up with a little something. And then I'll be like, 'Alright!' And then I'll come with the next four measures and so-forth and so on."

Do you kind of flip-flop and mish-mash and both of you play the same roles at different times? Or do you find yourself playing the same role, where you're always harmonizing with him, or vice-versa?

"I think, for the most part," answers Oz, "I'm harmonizing with him. I think Mike is the guy that kind of comes up with the initial idea and I just kinda bounce off that."

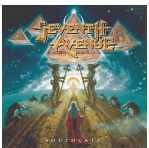
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ALBUM REVIEWS



STRYPER MURDER BY PRIDE

Four years ago, when Stryper announced they had re-formed and would be releasing *Reborn*, their first album of all-new material since 1990's *Against the Law*, fan anticipation was high. Despite all the hype, however, the general consensus was that *Reborn* was a good, but not great, album. Fast forwarding to today, fans are understandably both excited and nervous about Stryper's new album, *Murder by Pride*. With catchy guitar hooks and solos, unforgettable melodies and huge background vocals, *Murder by Pride* is the great album fans are hoping for! As for the songs, the re-recording of "My Love (I'll Always Show)" and the cover of Boston's "Peace of Mind" are both terrific, but are far from the highlights of the album. Upon hearing the opening track, "Eclipse of the Son," it's quickly evident Stryper has captured their old sound; even the production sounds like classic Stryper (this is meant as a compliment, as Stryper has always had top-notch production). The second track, "4 Leaf Clover," opens with one of the heaviest and most memorable guitar riffs in Stryper's history. *Murder by Pride* also includes a great ballad, "Alive," and a few songs that have a modern edge to them, such as the Creed-like "I Believe," without sounding out of place. The only minor complaint is that a few of the songs on the second half of the album aren't as strong as the others. Still, this is classic Stryper. I think people will be surprised by how good this album is. [Big3] Chris Beck



SEVENTH AVENUE SOUTHGATE (REISSUE)

Originally released on Treasure Hunt Records in 1998, *Southgate* is readily available again. And it sounds just as fresh in 2009 as it did 11 years ago. This German progressive/power/speed metal band has that timeless quality many bands wish they had. All the tracks are the same as the original, and I've been unable to find out if any re-mastering has taken place. While there are a couple of awkward German-to-English moments in the lyrics, overall this is a great release, particularly for fans of Helloween, Gammy Ray, Blind Guardian and the like. And the artwork and packaging are top-notch! [Ulterium] Loyd Harp



A PLEA FOR PURGING DEPRAVITY

One look at APFP's merch page, or one live viewing of this band and the conclusion is clear: these goofballs enjoy what they do and like to have fun. One listen to *Depravity* on the other hand, and you're left with bleeding ears and the weight of the world in your lap. Gone are the melodisms of 2007's *Critique of Mind and Thought*. This time, it's dark, brooding and heavy. Although it still resides in the metalcore camp, this one challenges the stereotypes of that genre. While my promo didn't come with lyrics to confirm this, *Depravity* feels like a concept album and the song titles suggest as much. If you like your metalcore sans clean vocals and overused breakdowns, with heavy and technical riffs in their place, look no further. [Facedown] Loyd Harp



AZBUK COMPILATION FOR ETERNITY

This Brazilian black-influenced death metal band has been making music since 1997. Having self-released three demos, Sullen has taken up the cause of presenting Azbuk to the masses. While this collection could serve as an introduction to the band, it has one major fault – there are no liner notes. Not even a bio, or even a listing of which year/demo the songs came from. Nonetheless, there are a few great tracks on here. Azbuk are at their best when they choose not to choose which side of the death/black line to fall on. [Sullen] Loyd Harp



DAGON TERRAPHOBIC

This Michigan band's second full-length album closely follows the speed/thrash/death mix that purveyors of the NWOAHM (thrash revival) such as Lamb of God and 3 Inches of Blood subscribe to, and Dagon does it quite admirably. "Ocean metal" is a title they lay claim to, and the lyrics all vary on the kind of "Hail and kill!" themes that Amon Amarth is known for, albeit on the high seas. Musically Dagon is one of the best new bands I've heard, but if you are of the ilk that expects Christian bands to actually have a Christian message, you're bound to come away disappointed. Artwork and packaging are noteworthy on this gatefold digipak CD. [Bombworks] Chris Gatto



ZAO AWAKE?

The kings of chaotic metalcore are back with a new album after a three-year absence. The physical CD (only 8,000 produced) is made up of six different paintings to make six different covers behind the name and title, for a nice collectable (if you don't take the digital route). *Awake?* is unmistakably Zao, yet brings few new elements to the table musically. It's certainly not *A Parade of Chaos*, but that is not to say it's not a great album. Zao just find themselves in an overcrowded market, and there are few surprises with the album. With that said, it is the growl and clean vocal interaction between Dan and Scott that seems to make for the most memorable songs. Lyrically, the album tackles many personal themes and readers will gather from interviews that Zao's focus is Christian-friendly, rather than ministry-oriented these days. [Ferret Music] Chris Gatto



SUSPIRIA PROFUNDIS IN WAR AGAINST SATAN

Raw, pure black metal on the debut release from this Italian band. Although no lyrics are included, *War* leaves little room for doubt about the band's stance with song titles like, "Holy Unblack Metal," and "Destroy the Satanic Pantheon," among others. The music is top-notch. Sole member Azazel doesn't waste time on atmospheric or psychedelic elements – they are there, but only to augment the harsh BM sounds. Not since 1994's *Heilig Usvart* have I heard anything this harsh and mesmerizing. [Sullen] Loyd Harp



NEIZBEZHNOST INEVITABLE

Ukraine seems to be the hotspot for (un)black metal these days. *Inevitable* features a melodic, yet very fast BM style, but without the folkish elements of many of their national peers. The use of high-pitched vocals gets slightly annoying at times (imagine early Guy Ritter mixed with Scott Waters), but the vocals are balanced with fast-paced rhythms and a melodic undertone that weaves itself in and out of the riffs in a unique way. CD features a bonus video for the lead-off track. [Sullen] Loyd Harp

bombworksrecords.com, bloodgoodband.com, strikefirstrecords.com, opengraverrecords.com



BLOODLINE SEVERED VISIONS REVEALED

For fans of the “mix all kinds of vocal styles into one song” kind of metal (a growing trend) this young semi-progressive, death/metalcore outfit from North Carolina will be one to check out. The shrieking black vocals are balanced nicely with “clean” death growls, while the melodic vocals – which are solid – could be just a bit more aggressive. Combined with the crushing riffs meets meandering, melodic guitar leads (I’m hearing Dark Tranquillity and In Flames) this reminds me most of what a band like Scar Symmetry, or even better Into Eternity has been doing lately. Yet, there are also some commercial elements that – dare I say it – sound a bit like Avenged Sevenfold. But make no mistake, Bloodline Severed is way heavy. Fortunately for this young band, they have developed a good sense of how to mix the melody – and the diversity – into the metal without duplicating themselves on every song. Great lyrics – solid metal. [Bombworks] Jonathan Swank



SEVENTH ANGEL THE DUST OF YEARS

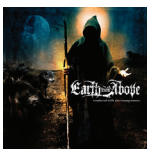
If you are expecting to read about how this new material sounds like the provocative thrash of “Expletive Deleted” and “Dr. Hatchet” or the crunchy concept metal of *Lament For The Weary* then stop reading right now! However, if you are a fan of Ian Arkley’s (My Silent Wake) and Simon Bibby’s current endeavors, then consuming this nine-course metal feast – the first new material for these guys together since 1992 – will be a satiating, yet possibly (for older fans) hard-to-digest experience. The vocals are so abruptly different from Seventh Angel’s “classic” style: Ian’s fantastic and discernable death growl has been nearly perfected (he sounds like Opeth’s Mikael Åkerfeldt) and fits perfectly with the huge doomy riffs; but the melodic vocals here just seem slightly anemic when compared to the distorted guitars and heavy rhythms that dominate these songs. It’s fair to state that much of this sounds more like My Silent Wake than old-school Seventh Angel, but that’s neither a bad thing nor is it to say that this isn’t heavy. Without a doubt, the sound quality is the best ever for this band. It’s cool to have these guys back. [Bombworks] Jonathan Swank



BLOODGOOD LIVE IN NORWAY DVD

Though these metal pioneers have been back together for several years, as of yet no new material has surfaced, so this decent festival footage is the first glimpse many of us have seen of Bloodgood in more than 15 years. Their nine-song, 45-minute set includes tracks from the first three albums and “S.O.S.” from *All Stand Together*. It’s good to see these guys in action again; Les is still the showman, and Michael adds pastoral wisdom, despite all the time that has passed. Mark Welling is back on drums and the real show stealer is Oz Fox, who is quite simply the best lead guitar player the band has ever had. During one song the band breaks into an impromptu “To Hell With the Devil” segment, which is quite amusing. Well worth the money for old fans.

[Bloodygood Pictures] Chris Gatto



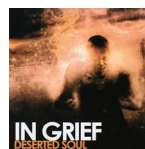
EARTH FROM ABOVE NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS

Upon hearing advance tracks a few months back, hopes were high for this debut. Let’s just say this is very heavy stuff. At this point, some warnings must be given: There are no melodic vocals to distract the listener from riff after punishing riff. And dance-floor breakdown seekers, look elsewhere; it was track 5 before I noticed a single breakdown and any that were present after that were so irregular that getting the pit going can’t be their only redeeming value. Fans of ultra-heavy and sometimes technical death metal/metalcore/deathcore kinda stuff just might have a new favorite band. [Strike First] Loyd Harp



REHUMANIZE RESIDENT APOSTASY

Christian grindcore project Rehumanize embrace the more political side of grindcore, leveling their angry sights at those they view as crazies in the ever-popular Christian bubble. Honestly though, if it wasn’t for the audio clips between songs I wouldn’t have been able to tell this from the music as the vocals are extreme and brutal and are not necessarily discernible. *Resident Apostasy* is solidly played and enjoyable to listen to musically, but the production is thin and detracts from the experience quite a lot in my opinion. [Open Grave] Michael Larson



IN GRIEF DESERTED SOUL

Who says death metal can’t be bombastic? The Euro power metal fanfare that opens this thing – not very often associated with melodic death – is a shocker, and sets the tone for the unorthodoxy that follows. It’s heavy, yet progressive (the proggy keys are outrageous!). It’s ambient, yet melodic (great guitars). It’s brutal, yet beautiful. It’s doomy, yet ethereal. A Scandinavian Becoming the Archetype? Perhaps. An amalgam of Dark Tranquillity, Opeth and Evergrey? Probably. Most importantly – with the exception of the transitional delays between tracks – this Norwegian quintet succeeds in connecting with the listener on just about all levels. In grief, rejoice. [Bombworks] Jonathan Swank



LAMENT THROUGH THE REFLECTION

Lament is one of Mexico’s oldest Christian metal bands and *Through the Reflection* was originally issued 10 years ago briefly on Little Rose Productions. These eight songs present a very progressive form of death metal with electric and acoustic guitars, and a prominent meandering bass line. The real treat of this re-issue is the addition of the band’s 1995 demo as Beheaded in Spanish and English. Though the production on these additional four songs is horrible, one has to love the classic/grind/death metal styling with over-the-top death vocals and appreciate how much this band has changed. Gatefold digipak CD with new artwork and hard-to-read liner notes. [Bombworks] Chris Gatto



AS I LAY DYING THIS IS WHO WE ARE (DVD)

When a metal band starts a show with a long intro, it’s a big risk. When it’s done right, like the double guitar leads and bombastic drumming that tilt AILD’s live show into full gear with “Separation,” it’s wonderful. This 3-disc DVD is long on up-close band interviews that truly define the title and fairly short on full-song live footage. You come away with an appreciation for the personal faith and musical dedication of the members (even though the revolving door of players is bluntly pointed out). One more disc of a full concert would’ve made this perfect. [Metal Blade] Doug Van Pelt

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THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET

By Steve Rowe

JUST THE SOUND THAT RAIN MAKES

I must admit, I do not like rain. I hate getting wet. But here in Australia our land is so dry and water reserves are under one-half full. So, I know that I need to thank God when the rain comes ... just as long as I don't get caught in it! Ha ha!

I imagine the sound of rain is like the sound of prayers to God – that refreshing sound that enables God to act on our behalf and bring some time of refreshment and change. Without prayer the spiritual side of our world is just drying up. I start every day with the reading of the Bible – putting my “armor” on – and prayer. Before I pray I repent, because, like all of you, I am a rotten sinner.

It amazes me just how many Christians I know and have known who do not read the Word, repent and pray, even on a semi-regular basis. Like rain, I do not like reading much, either, but I know at the very least I must read the Bible, and of course this magazine! Ha ha.

So many people say to me, “I do not understand the Bible and I do not know what to pray for.” Sad but true! So, here are some basic tips: Start with reading the Psalms, Proverbs, the Gospels, Ephesians and James – books of the Bible that are full of wisdom for our Christian walk. Then repent

of your sin. After this, pray for your family, friends, sports teams and work mates and even people you meet here and there.

Another suggestion that is very simple: As you read through this magazine, pray for each band and each band member. No matter if we are old-school Jesus Metal or new-school positive rock, we all have one thing in common as believers – we all want to see people come to faith in Jesus. Christian bands are on the front line with the ability to shine from a musical platform. They need your prayers. If we all commit the bands in these pages to God, this beloved ‘zine of ours will grow. Plus, the editor will be blessed by its growth and God will hear that we are real about seeing those “into” rock and metal music saved.

Let us join together in prayer for our Christian music scene, so that God can hear the rain and pour His blessing on these bands here. Really, this is just the basics in seeing this scene and ‘zine thrive. Whenever I read Christian metal forums it is always about people’s perspectives on music styles. Can I encourage discussion about how God is working in your lives and how this has been helped by Christian music?



LOCKED AWAY... In the mid to late 80's the thrash scene was thriving in both the secular and Christian markets. Bands like Vengeance Rising, Deliverance, and Believer were leading the pack in the Christian thrash circuit. In 1989 somewhere in Pennsylvania a demo tape would emerge that would make a long lasting impression on the Christian



Thrash scene. That demo was called... *Totally Possessed*. The band... **THRESHER!** With label interest in both markets, recorded what would be their next and ultimately their final, full-length release, *Here I Am*. The band would begin to deteriorate and the album was never released ... **UNTIL NOW!**

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"On this record we flip-flopped," interjects Michael. "Oz had an idea for a solo and then I had an idea and we made that work and then figured out the rest of it."

What's the hardest song to play on the new album?

"I don't know," answers Oz. "We haven't played enough of them."

"For me to sing," explains Michael, "the hardest song would be 'Mercy Over Blame.' That's a booger. There's some gritty, high, belty range (vocals). As far as guitars go...? I don't know."

"They're all about the same caliber," analyzes Oz. "There's a lot of intricate parts to every song, so to be able to pull it off live and make it sound close to the album, they're all a challenge."

"You know what we do, usually?" Michael begins a statement with a question, and it's hard to tell if he's serious. "The songs that are the toughest ones to play...?" He motions with his hand, as if tossing something: "Outta here!"

"We don't do 'em," laughs Oz.

"We're lazy like that."

I asked the comedic duo about their set-list for the upcoming tour. "Here's what I had in mind," explains Michael. "We'll make a list for Tracy with stuff from *Reborn* and *Murder By Pride* – all new material; and then we're doing a setlist with Tim of all the classic stuff – from *Yellow & Black...* to *Against The Law*. So, the tough part is we're doing a 45-minute set with Tracy and then maybe a 45-50-minute with Tim and then we're doing a 3-song encore. We're talking a 2-hour set, total. It gets tough. 'Okay, what songs do we do from what album?' The problem is, *To Hell With The Devil* was the most popular album, as far as sales go. And that's got the most material on it where you're drawn to want to

do it, because, 'Oh gosh! That was on MTV! That was on MTV! That was good. That was that...' So, we'll probably do a few more songs from that album. So, instead of just two or three from all the others, maybe with that one we'll do four or five. But it's going to be tricky, because all of a sudden you're running into 15 songs. It's going to be hard. But I know this much: I'm going to pull out songs we haven't played in years, or, quite possibly, we've never played. I'm thinking, maybe from *Soldiers Under Command* we do a song called 'Surrender.' People have asked for that for a long time and we haven't done it for a long time, so why not do it?"

"I have a personal favorite I'd like to try, if we could," interjects Oz. "It would be great to do... Put Timmy on the keyboards and do 'First Love.' That'd be a lot of fun."

"Yeah, that'd be cool," adds Michael. "That would be cool – songs we haven't done in a long, long time. Another one that people have been requesting a lot lately is 'You Know What To Do.' That was the first video and kind of a cool tune. That might be cool. From *In God We Trust* – we don't do a lot of material from that, because that was a very difficult record to pull off, because of the vocal range. So, we're going to have to drop some keys, probably."

"That's why we drop-D tuned 'In God We Trust' on the *Reborn* album," explains Oz.

"But, it would be great to do some material off of that, too," affirms Michael. "I think at least 'Always There For You.' And maybe another song... It's going to be fun."

What's the one theme or point you want people to come away with after getting this album?

Michael answers first: "The big point for me and where I'm at is: People trying to stay focused on God and the life that He has for them and His will in their life and stop being so distracted by everything else that doesn't

matter in life. If I can help people see that with what I've been through, that'd be awesome."

Oz: "I know on my behalf and I hear what he's saying, and that's really awesome. What you go through in life, you can share with other people and help them get through their thing – whatever it may be. You get hurt by things or situations and have stuff happen in your life; when God gets you through it, you have a testimony. And you take that testimony and help somebody else that's going through it, too, and having a hard time. That's where God blesses you in the future with things like that and situations. And, believe me, I went through a divorce in 2006, and it wasn't pretty. It was very emotional, but I'm able to help other men get through what I've been through. Which is really awesome... I'm blessed with that, when God uses me. He started showing me that He can use you in that hurt to help others. It's really cool."

"I think it's going to be a great year and a great tour," adds Michael. "And I'm excited. I really am excited, and that wasn't easy for me to say for a long time about a Stryper tour. I'm excited about this tour. It's going to be hard, because Mike's going, Lena's going (his two children). It's going to be a lot of travel and a lot of things to work through within the band. That's fine. I'm willing to do that. I think we all are. It's not going to be an easy road. There's going to be a lot of things going on that we're going to have to put our pride aside – as the song says – and just love each other and work it out."

By all indications, and by God's grace, this might very well be the band's best tour ever. It'll be exciting to find out, that's for sure.

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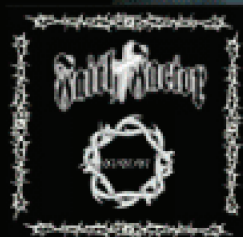
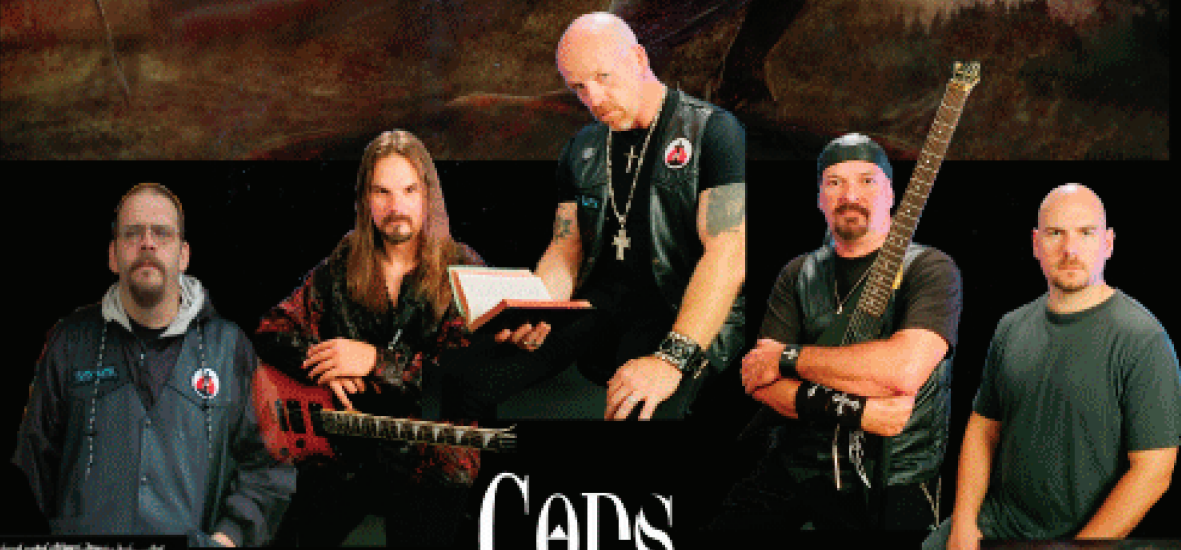
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